

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

The Dancing Israelis: FBI Docs Shed Light on Apparent Mossad Foreknowledge of 9/11 Attacks

As another 9/11 anniversary comes and goes, many questions surrounding the events remained unanswered. MintPress brings you a freshly updated article, originally published in May, 2019 that seeks answers to some of those questions.

by *Whitney Webb*

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 266 Comments     

NEW YORK — For nearly two decades, one of the most overlooked and little known *arrests* made in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks was that of the so-called “High Fivers,” or the “Dancing Israelis.” However, new information released by the FBI on May 7 has brought fresh scrutiny to the possibility that the “Dancing Israelis,” at least two of whom were known Mossad operatives, had prior knowledge of the attacks on the World Trade Center.

Shortly after 8:46 a.m. on the day of the attacks, just minutes after the first plane struck the World Trade Center, five men — later revealed to be Israeli nationals — had positioned themselves in the parking lot of the Doric Apartment Complex in Union City, New Jersey, where they were seen taking pictures and filming the attacks while also celebrating the destruction of the towers and “high fiving” each other. At least *one eyewitness* interviewed by the FBI had seen the Israelis’ van in the parking lot as early as 8:00 a.m. that day, more than 40 minutes prior to the attack. The story *received coverage* in *U.S. mainstream media* at the time but has since been largely forgotten.

The men — Sivan Kurzberg, Paul Kurzberg, Oded Ellner, Yaron Shimuel and Omar Marmari — were **subsequently apprehended** by law enforcement and claimed to be Israeli tourists on a “working holiday” in the United States where they were employed by a moving company, Urban Moving Systems. Upon his arrest, Sivan Kurzberg told the arresting officer, “We are Israeli; we are not your problem. Your problems are our problems, The Palestinians are the problem.”

For years, the official story has been that these individuals, while they had engaged in “immature” behavior by celebrating and being “visibly happy” in their documenting of the attacks, had no prior knowledge of the attack. However, **newly released FBI copies of the photos** taken by the five Israelis strongly suggest that these individuals had prior knowledge of the attacks on the World Trade Center. The copies of the photos were obtained via a FOIA request made by **a private citizen**.



According to a former high-ranking American intelligence official who spoke to the *Jewish Daily Forward* in 2002, the FBI concluded in its investigation that the five Israelis arrested “were conducting a Mossad surveillance mission and that their employer, Urban Moving Systems of Weehawken, NJ, served as a front.” At least two of the men arrested **were determined** to have direct links to the Mossad after their names appeared in a CIA-FBI database of foreign intelligence operatives. According to one of their lawyers, one of the men, Paul Kurzberg, had previously worked for the Mossad in another country prior to arriving in the United States. Another of those arrested, Oded Ellner, **subsequently stated** on Israeli TV that the five Israelis had been in New York at the time “to document the event,” meaning the attack on the World Trade Center.

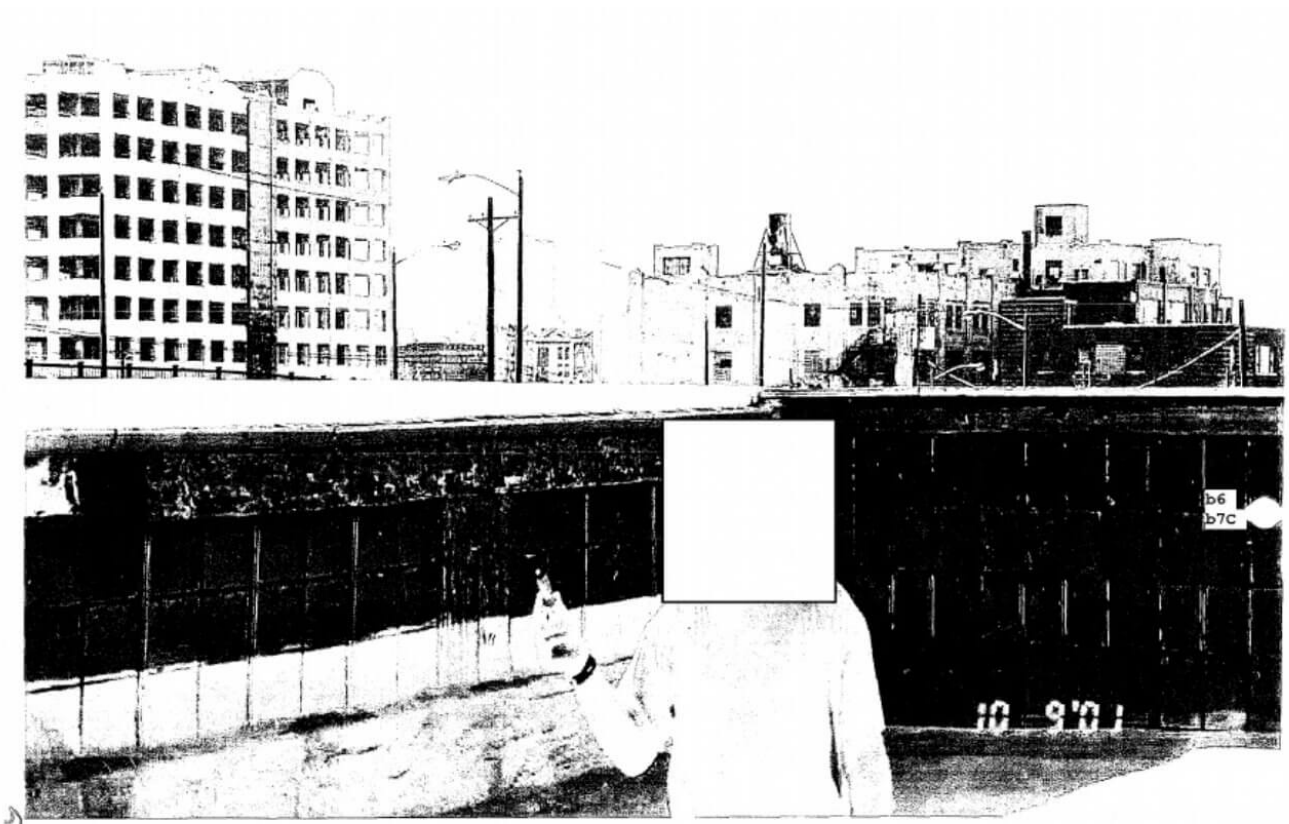
The FOIA release of **the photos** is notable because responses to prior FOIA requests to the Department of Justice, which oversees the FBI, had previously claimed that all of the photos taken by the Israeli nationals had been destroyed in January 2014. The photos themselves are heavily redacted, making it impossible to see the Israelis’ facial expressions. However, previously **declassified yet heavily redacted FBI reports** state that the Israelis are “visibly happy” in nearly every photo, even when the burning towers are in the background. The photos released are also not original copies and instead appear to be photocopies of photocopies of the original pictures. In addition, of the original 76 pictures developed by authorities from the camera in the Israelis’ possession, only 14 were released.

Based on the impressions of the French website *Panamza* and subsequently *MintPress*, three of these photos — despite the heavy redaction and poor quality — appear damning. Since 2001,

even though the photos were never released until now, it had been known that one of the Israelis arrested — Sivan Kurzberg — was seen in a photo “holding a lighted lighter in the foreground, with the smoldering wreckage [of the twin towers] in the background,” according to Steven Noah Gordon, then-lawyer for the five Israelis, as cited in a [New York Times report](#) from November 2001.

The picture of Kurzberg with the lit lighter appears to be photo #5 in the new FOIA release. Yet, the picture released includes a visible date of September 10, 2001, the day before the attacks, as do two other photos — images #7 and #8 in the collection — whereas all other photos with dates show only the month and the year (9 '01). The FOIA release did not provide any information as to the apparent discrepancy in dates.

While this could be explained away as the camera in question being programmed with a slightly inaccurate date, that doesn't seem to be the case for two reasons. First, only three out of the 14 pictures appear to carry that date and, second, previously declassified FBI reports report an eyewitness adamantly stating that [Sivan Kurzberg](#) had visited the Doric Apartments on September 10, 2001 at around 3 p.m. with at least one other man, with whom he was conversing in a foreign language, and had identified himself as a “construction worker” to a tenant (page 61 of [declassified FBI report](#)).



Sivan Kurzberg holds a lit lighter with the Manhattan skyline in the background. The date September 10, 2001 visible in the bottom right corner | Photo #5

In addition, the FBI report noted that a van from Urban Moving Systems, the company that employed the five Israelis at the time of their arrest, was present and was involved in moving a tenant out of the complex on September 10 and that the movers all had foreign accents. Thus, images 5, 7 and 8 may have been taken at the same complex a day before the attacks.

This raises two possibilities. First, that there are two images of Kurzberg with a lit lighter in front of the towers, one taken before the attack and one taken at the time of the attack, and that the FBI released only one of them. Second, that Kurzberg took the picture with the lighter only the day before the attack and his lawyer misrepresented the contents of the photo to the *New York Times*. Given that the background of the photo — particularly the state of the towers — is indiscernible in the recently released photo, it is difficult to determine which is the case.



One of the Israelis points to what is presumably the World Trade Center, in Manhattan on September 11, 2001 | Photo #2

However, other analysts have interpreted the photos quite differently. For instance, Ryan Dawson, formerly of Newsbud, cited the police report that details the clothing of some of the Israelis at the time of their arrest and used that to link identities to the redacted faces in the pictures. He believes that the Israeli holding the lighter is not Sivan Kurzberg, but his brother Paul. Meanwhile, the person who filed the FOIA request that resulted in the picture's release, who wished to remain anonymous, thought that Omer Marmari was more likely to be the man with the lighter.

Both have stated that all pictures were likely to have been taken on the day of the attacks. One reason given for the appearance of the date of September 10, 2001 in only some of the photos is due to the heavy editing, which rendered it invisible in the remaining photos. Dawson asserted that the incorrect date was due to the Israelis' panicking when they were pulled over and attempting to edit the date and hour on the camera upon the arrest in an effort to hide the evidence. Another explanation put forth is that it was the result of a camera configuration error.

Given the highly redacted and edited nature of the pictures, what is most notable of all is the fact of what is not seen (i.e. edited out) in the photos. Clearly, there was an interest in preventing the public from seeing the state of the towers at the time of the photos were taken and also in preventing the public from seeing the facial expressions of the Israelis, despite it being known from the FBI report that they are "visibly happy" and "jovial." The state of the towers being edited out is particularly telling.

As to whether any of the Israelis knew of the attacks in advance, the relevant section of the FBI report that asks "1. Did the Israeli nationals have foreknowledge of the events at WTC and were they filming the events prior to and in anticipation of the explosion?" is notably redacted in its entirety, suggesting that the FBI did not determine the answer to that question to be an emphatic "no."

One of the 9/11 loose-ends coverups?

If images 5 and 7 were indeed taken the day prior to the attack, the question then becomes why the FBI officially concluded that the arrested Israelis had no prior knowledge of the attacks? One report from *ABC News* dated June 2002 suggests that the Bush administration intervened in the investigation. That report **states** that "Israeli and U.S. government officials worked out a deal — and after 71 days, the five Israelis were taken out of jail, put on a plane, and deported back home [to Israel]." If the Bush administration had cut a deal with Israel's government to cover up the incident, it certainly **would not have been the first time** a U.S. presidential administration had done so on Israel's behalf.

Further evidence that higher-ups in the administration intervened is the fact that then-Attorney General John Ashcroft personally **signed off** on the detainees' release. Upon his entering the private sector as a lobbyist and consultant in 2005, the Israeli government became one of Ashcroft's **first clients**.

A cover-up certainly seems to have happened to some extent, between the destruction of records of the investigation and the fact that official conclusions of the investigation do not add up. In the latter case, the FBI — in a file dated September 24, 2001— **officially stated** that they "determined that none of the Israelis were actively engaged in clandestine intelligence activities in the United States." However, that conclusion was **directly contradicted** by U.S. officials a year later and by the fact that Israel's own government **subsequently acknowledged** that the five Israelis had indeed been involved in "clandestine intelligence activities in the United States."

In addition, the new FOIA release of the photos suggests that another FBI conclusion — that “none of the pictures developed from the film found inside the 35-mm camera depicted the twin towers prior to the attack” — was inaccurate. This may explain why the images released via the recent FOIA request were heavily edited leaving details in the background greatly obscured, making it impossible to determine whether the photos were taken prior to or during the attacks based solely on the state of the towers.

“Tourists” with cash-stuffed socks, box cutters, and explosives?

Beyond the photos and observed activities of the so-called “Dancing Israelis,” it is worth revisiting several other suspicious circumstances linked to their arrest that clearly show that the men in question were hardly the “tourists” they had claimed to be. One often cited example is the fact that one of the men, Oded Ellner, had a “white sock-like sack filled with \$4,700 in cash,” as well as maps of the city with certain places highlighted, and box cutters. In addition, the van in which the Israelis were arrested was “oddly” lacking “equipment typically used in a moving company’s daily duties,” according to the FBI, and residue of explosives was found in the van.

Of the explosive residue, the declassified FBI report states:

“A search of the van and individuals was conducted at the time of the vehicle stop. The vehicle was also searched by a trained bomb-sniffing dog which yielded a positive result for the presence of explosive traces. Swabs of the vehicle’s interior were taken, and those samples were sent to the FBI laboratory for further analysis. Final results are still pending.”

In total, the FBI reported that four items related to explosives were found in the van and are labeled in the report as “Fabric Sample (Explosive Residue),” “Control Swabs – SA [–] Gloves,” “Control Swabs – (Bomb Suits),” and “Blanket Samples For Explosive Residue.” In addition, a VHS tape and some still photographs found in the van “were sent to Laboratory Examiner [redacted] (Explosives Unit).”

In addition to the strange nature of some of the Israelis’ possessions in the van and on their person, the company that employed them — Urban Moving Systems — was of special interest to the FBI, which concluded that the company was likely a “fraudulent operation.” Upon a search of the company’s premises, the FBI noted that “little evidence of a legitimate business operation was found.” The FBI report also noted that there were an “unusually large number of computers relative to the number of employees for such a fairly small business” and that “further investigation identified several pseudo-names or aliases associated with Urban Moving Systems and its operations.”

The FBI presence at the Urban Moving Systems search site drew the attention of the local media and was later reported on both television and in the local press. A former Urban Moving Systems employee later contacted the Newark Division with information indicating that he had

quit his employment with Urban Moving Systems as a result of the high amount of anti-American sentiment present among Urban's employees. The former employee stated that an Israeli employee of Urban had even once remarked, "Give us twenty years and we'll take over your media and destroy your country" (page 37 of [the FBI report](#)).

The FBI returned to search the premises of Urban Moving Systems a month later, but by that time found:

"The building and all of its contents had been abandoned by...the owner of Urban Moving Systems. This [was] apparently being done to avoid criminal prosecution after the 09/11/2001 arrest of five of his employees and subsequent seizure of his office computer systems by members of the FBI-NK on or around 09/13/2001."

The company's owner — Dominik Otto Suter, an Israeli citizen — [had fled to Israel](#) on September 14, 2001, two days after he had been questioned by the FBI. The FBI [told ABC News](#) that "Urban Moving may have been providing cover for an Israeli intelligence operation." Surprisingly, since at least 2016, Suter [has been living](#) in the San Francisco Bay Area, where he [works for](#) a contractor for major tech companies like Google and Microsoft. According to the public records database *Intelius*, in 2006 and 2007 Suter also worked for a telecommunications company — Granite Telecommunications — [that works for](#) the U.S. military and several other U.S. government agencies.

In addition to Urban Moving Systems, another moving company, Classic International Movers, became of interest in connection with the investigation into the "Dancing Israelis," which led to the arrest and detention of four Israeli nationals who worked for this separate moving company. The FBI's Miami Division had alerted the Newark Division that Classic International Movers was believed to have been used by one of the 19 alleged 9/11 hijackers before the attack, and one of the "Dancing Israelis" had the number for Classic International Movers written in a notebook that was seized at the time of his arrest. The report further states that one of the Israelis of Classic International Movers who was arrested "was visibly disturbed by the Agents' questioning regarding his personal email account."

A crowded dance floor

While the case of the "Dancing Israelis" has long been treated as an outlier in the aftermath of September 11, what is often overlooked is the fact that hundreds of Israeli nationals were arrested in the aftermath of the attacks.

According to [a FOX News report](#) from December 2001, 60 Israelis were apprehended or detained after September 11, with most deported, and a total of 140 Israelis were arrested and detained in all of 2001 by federal authorities. That report claimed that the arrests, ostensibly including the "Dancing Israelis," were in relation to an investigation of "an organized [Israeli] intelligence gathering operation designed to 'penetrate government facilities.'"

The report also added that most of those arrested, in addition to having served in the IDF, had “intelligence expertise” and worked for Israeli companies that specialized in wiretapping. Some of those detained were also active members of the Israeli military; and several detainees, including the “Dancing Israelis,” had failed polygraph tests when asked if they had been surveilling the U.S. government.

Watch | FOX News December 2001 report on Mossad spying prior to 9/11

A key aspect of that report, compiled by journalist Carl Cameron, also states that federal investigators widely suspected that Israeli intelligence had prior knowledge of the September 11 attacks. In the report, Cameron stated:

“ The Israelis may have gathered intelligence about the attacks in advance and not shared it. A highly placed investigator said there are ‘tie-ins’ but when asked for details he flatly refused to describe them saying: ‘Evidence linking these Israelis to 9-11 is classified. I cannot tell you about the evidence that has been gathered. It is classified information.’”

One exchange between Cameron and host Brit Hume included in the report is particularly telling:

HUME: “Carl, what about this question of advanced knowledge of what was going to happen on 9/11? How clear are investigators that some Israeli agents may have known something?”

CAMERON: “Well it’s very explosive information obviously and there is a great deal of evidence that they say they have collected. None of it necessarily conclusive. It’s more when they put it all together a big question they say is, ‘How could they have not known?’ — almost a direct quote, Brit.”

However, it is essential to note that Israeli intelligence **did attempt to warn** the U.S. government at least twice beginning in August 2001 as did the intelligence agencies of many other countries, including France, the UK, Egypt, Russia and Jordan. Yet, no people connected to any other intelligence agency other than Israel were caught celebrating the attacks as they took place in the area nor were accused by mainstream media of operating a large spy ring within the U.S. at the time. One theory to explain this discrepancy is that the Mossad elements of which the “Dancing Israelis” and other alleged Israeli spies could have been part of a specific section of Israeli intelligence that were acting independently as a rogue agency. Such a possibility is not unusual given that divisions of or groups within the CIA have been known to “**go rogue**” on several occasions.

9/11 as a big — and acknowledged — Israeli win

If the “Dancing Israelis”, and more broadly the Mossad and the Israeli government, had foreknowledge of September 11, why would they remain silent and not attempt to warn the American government or public of the coming attacks? In the case of the “Dancing Israelis,” why would Israelis *celebrate* such an attack?

One of the detained “Dancing Israelis,” Omer Marmari, told police the following about why he viewed the September 11 attacks in a positive light:

“ Israel now has hope that the world will now understand us. Americans are naïve and America is easy to get inside. There are not a lot of checks in America. And now America will be tougher about who gets into their country.”

While Marmari’s statement may suggest one reason some of the “Dancing Israelis” were so “visibly happy” in their photographs, there are also other statements made by top Israeli politicians that suggest why the Israeli government and its intelligence agency declined to act on apparent foreknowledge of the attack.

When asked, on the day of the 9/11 attacks, how the attacks would affect American-Israeli relations, Benjamin Netanyahu — the current Israeli prime minister — **told the *New York Times*** that “It’s very good,” before quickly adding “Well, not very good, but it will generate immediate sympathy.” He then predicted, much as Marmari had, that the attacks would “strengthen the bond between our two peoples, because we’ve experienced terror over so many decades, but the United States has now experienced a massive hemorrhaging of terror.”

Netanyahu, in a candid conversation recorded in 2001, also echoed Marmari’s claim that Americans are naïve. In that recording, **Netanyahu said**:

“ I know what America is. America is something that can easily be moved. Moved to the right direction. ... They won’t get in our way. They won’t get in our way... 80 percent of the Americans support us. It’s absurd.”

In addition, also on the day of the September 11 attacks, Netanyahu — who at the time was not in political office — **held a press conference** in which he claimed that he had predicted the attacks on the World Trade Center by “militant Islam” in his 1995 book, *Fighting Terrorism: How Democracies Can Defeat Domestic and International Terrorism*. In that book, Netanyahu had posited that Iranian-linked “militants” would set off a nuclear bomb in the basement of the World Trade Center.

During his press conference on the day of the attacks, Netanyahu also asserted that the 9/11 attacks would be a turning point for America and compared them to the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. Netanyahu’s statement echoes the infamous line from the “**Rebuilding America’s Defenses**” document authored by the neoconservative think tank, the Project for a New American Century (PNAC). That line reads. “Further, the process of transformation [towards a neo-Reaganite foreign policy and hyper-militarism], even if it brings revolutionary change, is likely to be a long one, absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event — like a new Pearl Harbor.”

Then again, years later In 2008, the Israeli newspaper *Maariv* reported that Netanyahu had stated that the September 11 attacks had greatly benefited Israel. He was **quoted as saying**: “We are benefiting from one thing, and that is the attack on the Twin Towers and Pentagon, and the American struggle in Iraq.”

Indeed, it goes without saying that the aftermath of 9/11 — which involved the U.S. leading a destructive effort throughout the Middle East — has indeed benefited Israel. Many of the U.S.’ post-9/11 “nation-building” efforts have notably mirrored the policy paper “**A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm**,” which was authored by American neoconservatives — PNAC members among them — for Netanyahu’s first term as prime minister.

That document calls for the creation of a “New Middle East” by, among other things, “weakening, containing, and even rolling back Syria” and “removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq — an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right.” As is known now, both of those main objectives have since come to pass, **each with strong Israeli involvement**.

Update | *This article was updated to include and accommodate alternative analyses of the newly released photos as well information on Israeli intelligence warnings to the U.S. prior to September 11, 2001 that came to the attention of MintPress after initial its publication.*

Feature photo | Four of the Israeli nationals arrested for “puzzling behavior” during the September 11 attacks are seen casually posing together in front of the Manhattan skyline while the September 11 attacks were in progress | Photo #1

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